



The Sacrament of Confirmation

A Lenten Course of Six Sermons

By the Reverend
Lawrence Leslie McReavy, J.C.D., M.A.

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I

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SACRAMENT
OF CONFIRMATION**

First Sunday in Lent

The Significance of the Sacrament of Confirmation*

"Brethren, we exhort you that you receive not the grace of God in vain. . . . But in all things let us exhibit ourselves as the ministers of God"
(Epistle, II Cor., vi. 1, 4).

SYNOPSIS:

- (1) *Unlike the first Christians, we forget the gratuitousness of grace and treat the Sacraments as mere passing incidents. Especially is this true of Confirmation.*
- (2) *Our need of Confirmation is shown by the experience of the Apostles before and after Pentecost, and by a comparison between our spiritual and our bodily life: like bodily growth, it brings us to spiritual maturity.*
- (3) *What Confirmation does: by bringing us to our prime, it completes the work of Baptism; hence the stress laid on it by the Apostles. It communicates the Holy Spirit in an especial way, confers His seven gifts, especially fortitude, and seals our enlistment in the army of Christ by imprinting an indelible character.*
- (4) *Confirmation is therefore not an act, but a state involving permanent responsibilities. As the Sacrament of our spiritual manhood, it requires that we "put away the things of a child," show personal initiative, cease playing soldiers and be soldiers. It admits us to our full spiritual inheritance, from which God will demand a return with usury. It calls for a spirit of comradeship and corporate responsibility in the good fight.*

We are so used to the boundless liberality of God's dispensations of grace that we are apt to take them for granted, as though they were a necessary consequence of our creation, part of our natural equipment, so to speak, like the air we breathe or the food we eat. The truth is, of course, that we have no claim whatever to grace. As the very name implies, it is entirely gratuitous and supernatural. God need never

* The author would recommend as suitable reading "Confirmation in the Modern World," by Matthias Laros (Sheed & Ward).

have raised us to the supernatural state and given us that share in His divine life which will one day enable us to see and enjoy Him face to face. Much less need He have helped us by actual graces to foster that life, and even regain it when it has been lost by sin. And least of all need He have provided, as He has in the Sacraments, unfailing sources of life and grace, to be ours for the asking. Indeed, for thousands of years men had to struggle on without these Sacraments, waiting always for the Christ who was to open wide the floodgates of God's bounty. And when at last "the acceptable time" was come, and "the day of salvation" dawned, the first Christians to enjoy the blessings of the new era were so conscious of their tremendous opportunity, that they never ceased to fear lest they should prove to have received the grace of God in vain.

Confirmation Treated as a Passing Incident

But times have changed. Men have long ceased to be thrilled by the thought of being born into a Christian world. The Redemption has become for many of us a mere date in history, and the Sacraments which dispense its fruits, instead of being the cardinal features of our lives, are treated as passing incidents. And if this is true, in greater or lesser degree, of all the Sacraments, above all is it true of Confirmation. The average man still appreciates the necessity of Baptism, the utility of Penance, and the sacredness of the Holy Eucharist; but Confirmation—well, is it not true that many, if not most, remember it merely as the occasion of receiving an additional, unused Christian name? And why? After all, you are not wanting in reverence. No, but you are wanting in knowledge, in realization; and now is the time to acquire that realization, now, when the Church is exhorting you to beware "lest you receive the grace of God in vain." That is why we propose to devote the Sundays of Lent to a thorough examination of Confirmation, in order that you may realize its importance and the far-reaching effect it should have on your lives.

Apostles' Experience Shows Need of Confirmation

Confirmation, as you all know, is that much-needed Sacrament in which we receive the Holy Ghost, in order to make us strong and perfect Christians and soldiers of Jesus Christ. Our Lord did not need to be God to know how much we want strengthening: the conduct of His Apostles was evidence enough. For three years they had been eye-witnesses of His divine power. They had watched Him heal the sick and raise the dead to life. They had assisted at the feeding of the five thousand, and had seen Him calm the storm in which their boat was foundering, with a mere word of command. After such experiences, one would have thought that their confidence in His protective power would know no bounds, and that they would be ready to face any danger in His cause. And yet, on the very night of their ordination to the priesthood, within a few hours of their first Holy Communion, they fled like frightened rabbits at the approach of an armed band and left their Lord to be seized, bound and led away prisoner. St. Peter at least, their bold and impetuous leader, might have been expected to show a better front; but, as you know, all His vaunted courage and fidelity evaporated at a simple question from a servant girl. Jesus of Nazareth his leader? Why, he didn't even know Him!

We can understand the dismay and terror of the Apostles at the crucifixion and death of their Lord, even though He had warned them what to expect. But even His Resurrection and tangible apparitions in His risen body failed to restore their lost courage. It is true that they ran to the tomb to witness the miracle, but it is also true that they hurried back to the seclusion of the Upper Room and left the sepulchre guards to proclaim the miracle in Jerusalem. And apparently Our Lord thought them safer indoors, at least for a while. "I send the promise of My Father upon you," He told them; "but stay you in the city until you be indued with power from on high" (Luke, xxiv. 49).

Fifty days later the promise of the Father was fulfilled, when the Holy Ghost descended upon the Apostles and endowed them with a heavenly power and courage such as they had never known before. The effect of their Confirmation was as instantaneous as it was astounding. From timid, self-conscious fishermen, they became in a moment fearless, out-

spoken witnesses to the truth. Within a few minutes of receiving the Holy Ghost, St. Peter was out on his doorstep and preached a sermon which, then and there, converted three thousand souls. A few days later, Peter and John were arrested for preaching in the very Temple itself. And when they were haled before the court of the High Priest, Peter, "filled with the Holy Ghost," spoke with such fearless eloquence that the princes and ancients "understanding that they were illiterate and ignorant men, wondered" (Acts, iv. 13). From then on, nothing could shake their courage or frighten them into silence, neither scourging, nor imprisonment, nor threat of death. "Indeed, they went from the presence of the Council (after a scourging), rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus. And every day they ceased not, in the temple, and from house to house, to teach and preach Christ Jesus" (Acts, v. 41-42).

The Sacrament of Spiritual Maturity

The mere story of the Apostles is therefore proof enough of our need of Confirmation and of its efficacy. But there is a further reason, inherent in the nature of things, which is worth our special attention. God has given us, not one, but two lives—a life of the body and a life of the soul; and since our spiritual life is a life in the true sense of the word, we may reasonably gauge its needs, to some extent at least, from the needs of our bodily life. Now, there are three things essential to bodily life: birth, by which a man begins to live, growth, by which his body is brought to full stature, and thirdly, nutrition, by which his bodily life and strength are maintained. All these three essential elements we find, as we might expect, in the spiritual life, and for all three Our Lord has provided a special Sacrament. The spiritual life, which is a partaking in the divine life, is born in us by water and the Holy Ghost in Baptism, and conserved in us by the divine food which we receive in Holy Communion. But birth and nourishment are not enough. If our spiritual life is to be as complete as our bodily life, it must grow to full strength and stature; and for this purpose Our Lord has instituted Confirmation, in which the Holy Ghost is given to us "ad robur"—unto strength (St. Thomas, *Summa*, III, Q. lxxv, art. 1).

Confirmation is, therefore, essentially the Sacrament of our spiritual maturity, or, if you like, our spiritual coming-of-age. By it the work begun on the day of our Baptism, our spiritual birthday, is completed and perfected, for by it we are changed from passive children of God into active, militant and responsible members of the Body of Christ. But it would be wrong to regard it as a mere complement to Baptism; for just as it has its own distinct character, so it has its own special effects. It is true that the greatest of its effects, the coming of the Holy Ghost, has already occurred in Baptism. But here in Confirmation He comes not merely to sanctify, but also to fortify, and He comes in greater fullness, enriching and adorning our spiritual prime with all the wealth of His seven gifts.

Above all, He brings us fortitude, the soldier's virtue; for Confirmation is, in a special sense, the Sacrament of the Christian soldier, the Sacrament by which the baptized Christian is enlisted in the army of Christ and fully equipped for the fray. The indelible character which, like Baptism and Holy Orders, it imprints on the soul, seals the enlistment as an irrevocable act which, once made, can never be retracted. When the bishop anoints us on the forehead with the sign of the cross, he fixes, as it were, to our military cap the badge of our great commander. From then onwards, we are either loyal soldiers or base deserters, one or the other.

Involves Permanent Responsibilities

The lesson of all this is, surely, that the common habit of regarding Confirmation as a mere incident in life, a duty which, once done, need not worry us again, is a calamitous travesty of the truth. Confirmation is not so much an act as a state, a state involving definite responsibilities, as durable as the character which it imprints on the soul. By bringing us to spiritual maturity, it raises us, as we have seen, to the state of spiritual manhood and womanhood. "When I was a child," says St. Paul, "I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away the things of a child" (I Cor., xiii. 11). So it must be with us. Baptism made us children of God. Children are content to be led, to be told what to do, and to accept what is done

for them by their parents and superiors. But now that Confirmation has brought us from childhood to manhood, we are expected to put away the things of a child and give evidence of our emancipation. As in temporal life, we are still subject to public authority, but we are expected now to show a certain initiative in our religious activities, to be ready to give as well as to receive, to do things ourselves, instead of merely waiting like children until others do them for us, to fight in the army of Christ, instead of merely playing at being soldiers.

And not only do we come of age in Confirmation, we also come into our spiritual inheritance. All the wealth of the Holy Ghost is poured upon us, and just as the world expects a man not to waste his substance, but to put it to good account, so God demands that we shall make full use of the boundless wealth put at our disposal. He has given us not one, but seven talents, all the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, and on every one of them He will demand a return with usury. When the day of reckoning comes, it will be of no avail to plead, like the unprofitable servant in the Gospel, that we went and hid our talents in the earth for fear that they might be lost. Like him, we shall be declared "wicked and slothful servants" and ordered to be "cast out into the exterior darkness" (Matt., xxv. 14-30). We must bring forth fruit, for Christianity is positive not negative: "He that is not with Me, is against Me," said Our Lord: "and he that gathered not with Me, scattereth" (Matt., xii. 30).

Involves Corporate Responsibilities

Finally, Confirmation carries with it a duty of corporate responsibility. "When a man comes to maturity," says St. Thomas Aquinas, "he begins to coöperate with others; whereas until then he lives, as it were, individually for himself" (*Summa*, III, Q. lxxii, art. 2). So too, we, having come to maturity in Confirmation, must develop a sense of our oneness in Christ, and of our duty to coöperate wholeheartedly with our fellow-members in the one common task of "restoring all things in Christ." It is a hard task which demands unity of hearts, unity of minds and unity of action; but if, true to the spirit of our Confirmation, we remember always the common badge that marks us all as comrades

in the one army of Christ, we need have no fear of the issue. We may have different posts to fill and different equipment, but all alike are armed with the irresistible weapon of good example. The symbol of the Confirmation of the Apostles was tongues of fire, because fire spreads, and they were to spread the Gospel by the fire of their eloquence. The symbol of our Confirmation is the sweet balsam mixed with the chrism with which we were anointed, because we are to spread the Gospel by the sweet odor of our good works.

Confirmation demands of us, therefore, that we be adult, responsible, active and united Christians always and everywhere. It affixes on our foreheads the indelible badge of our great Commander, making it impossible for us ever to abandon the fight without showing ourselves to all the world for what we are—deserters. It equips us with all the graces we need for the good fight, and anoints us as members for all time of the universal priesthood of Christ. "Brethren, we exhort you that you receive not the grace of God in vain. . . . But in all things let us exhibit ourselves as the ministers—that is, the servants—of God" (II Cor., vi, 1, 4).

II

THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Second Sunday in Lent

The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

"For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto sanctification, in Christ Jesus Our Lord" (Epistle, I Thess., iv. 7).

SYNOPSIS:

- (1) *The work of our sanctification is a work of all three Divine Persons. The Son incorporates us in His Mystical Body, making us one with Himself. The Father adopts us in consequence into the Divine Family. The Holy Spirit is the life-giving soul which makes this Body a living reality. Hence the importance of Confirmation, in which we receive the fullness of the Spirit. Neglect due to failure to grasp vital importance of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.*
- (2) *It was not always so. The mission of the Spirit was a constant theme of the prophets. Our Lord preached it as the culmination and continuation of His work. The Apostles, after Pentecost, bore constant witness to its vital importance.*
- (3) *To be full-grown Christians, worthy of our Confirmation, we must be vividly conscious of the indwelling of the Spirit, its meaning, its effects, and must plan our lives accordingly. Christianity is not a mere system of life: it is God living in us. We are debtors, therefore, not to the flesh but to the Spirit. It gives us sonship of God and a title to our inheritance. We have that for which we hope. Respect due to "temples of the Holy Ghost."*

It is a theological truth that all God's external actions are common to all three Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity. God the Father and God the Holy Ghost must, therefore, be said to share equally with God the Son in the work of our redemption and sanctification. It was and is effected, of course, through the Incarnation of God the Son: that is why we reserve the name of Redeemer to Christ Our Lord. But the power that wrought the Incarnation is the one single omnipotence of the triune God. It is, therefore, God, the one God in three Persons, who in the words of to-day's Epistle "has called us unto sanctification in Christ

Jesus Our Lord." To fail to realize this, to fail to assign to each of the Divine Persons His common and His special part, would be to fall considerably short in our appreciation of this tremendous mystery.

The special mission of God the Son is a matter of faith and history. He and He alone "was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, the glory, as it were, of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John, i. 14). The Son, therefore, we know, has sanctified us by wedding Himself to our human nature. He has engrafted us as branches in Himself, the Vine, united us as members in His Mystical Body, and so, by communicating to us a share in His own fullness of grace, has made us "partakers of the divine nature" (II Peter, i. 4). It is here that we can discern the special part of God the Father; for the effect of our identification with Christ is that the Father sees us no longer as sinful creatures, infinitely removed from His august holiness by our sinful nature. He sees us only as members of the Body of His only-begotten Son, as one body with Him; and embracing us in the paternal love which He bears His Son, adopts us into the Divine Family as sons and heirs, "heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom., viii. 17).

Holy Spirit the Soul of the Mystical Body

But if our incorporation in Christ and consequent sonship of God are to be real, and not mere figures of speech, the Mystical Body of Christ must be a real body, not of course in the material and fleshly sense, but none the less really and truly alive. In other words, it must have a soul, a vital principle, to give it energy and driving power, and to enable it to grow. That soul is the Holy Spirit. "The Holy Spirit," says St. Augustine, "is to Christ's Body, the Church, what the soul is to the human body" (Serm. clxxvii, 3).

In order, therefore, to become living members of the Body of Christ—and remember, in no other way can we become adopted sons of His Father and heirs to His inheritance—we must be animated and vivified by the Holy Spirit, its vital principle. That is why Baptism is so indispensable to salvation, and Confirmation so powerful an aid; because in Baptism we are "born again of water and the Holy Ghost," and in

Confirmation this new Christ-life is re-invigorated, intensified and brought to its due maturity by a fresh and fuller infusion of the Holy Ghost. If, then, like so many modern Christians, we tend to underestimate the value of Confirmation, it can only be because we have failed to appreciate the vital importance—the literally *vital* importance—of the Holy Ghost in the great work of our redemption and sanctification. And not until we become as fully aware of God the Holy Ghost as we are of God the Father and God the Son, will Confirmation take its proper place in our lives.

The Prophets Foretold the Mission of the Spirit

The tremendous part played by the Holy Spirit in the birth and growth of Christ's Body, the Church, is widely ignored to-day, partly because it is mysterious, and perhaps partly because it is no longer news, and our appetite to-day is not for truth but only for news. It was not always so. Centuries before the coming of Christ, the "mission" of the Holy Ghost was a constantly recurring theme of the prophets, above all, of Isaias, greatest of the Messianic prophets. Christ, he says, "shall come as a violent stream, which the Spirit of the Lord driveth on" (lx. 19). He sees the coming of the Holy Ghost as the one ray of light and hope in a world of thorns and briers, where all shall be darkness and desolation, "until," as he says, "the Spirit be poured upon us from on high." Then, and then only, "the desert shall be as a charmel, and the charmel shall be counted for a forest, and judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and justice shall sit in charmel. And the work of justice shall be peace, and the service of justice quietness, and security for ever" (xxxii. 14-17). The work of our redemption and sanctification is foreseen, therefore, as consisting essentially in a vast outpouring of the Spirit of God upon all mankind. "It shall come to pass after this," we read in Joel, "that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh Upon My servants and handmaids in those days I will pour forth My Spirit" (ii. 28-29).

Christ Stressed It as Culmination of His Work

In the same way, Our Lord always visualized the coming of the Holy Ghost as the crown and culmination of His work. If He Himself had

been the initiator of the new order of things, the Holy Spirit was to be its continuator. "When He, the Spirit of truth is come," said Our Lord to His Apostles at the Last Supper, "He will teach you all truth. . . . He shall glorify Me, because He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it to you" (John, xvi. 13-14). Not till He Himself, as Redeemer, had cleared the foundations of the New Order, could the Holy Spirit, as Sanctifier, build upon them. So St. John, recording one of Our Lord's earlier promises "of the Spirit which they should receive who believed in Him," adds in explanation: "for as yet the Spirit was not given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (vii. 39). Therefore, as Our Lord told them, "it is expedient for you that I go: for if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you, but if I go, I will send Him to you" (John, xvi. 7).

Our incarnate Emmanuel, our "God-with-us" in the flesh, could not remain here beyond the natural term of fleshly life; but He was to be followed by a mystical Emmanuel who would take His place as our advocate, our intermediary, our link with God the Father, and who could never either die or leave us. "I will ask the Father," He promised them, "and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, nor knoweth Him: but you shall know Him, because He shall abide with you, and *shall be in you*" (John, xiv. 16-17). It was foreordained that Our Lord should depart from us in His body of flesh: "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again I leave the world, and I go to the Father" (John, xvi. 28). But He would not leave us orphans, for He was to remain with us in that Mystical Body, of which the Holy Spirit would be the permanent life-giving soul.

The Apostles Bore Constant Witness to It

The Apostles were slow to appreciate the full import of Our Lord's consoling doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, almost as slow as we are to-day to grasp this great truth. But "when the days of Pentecost were accomplished . . . and suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting, and there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon everyone of them, and they were all filled with the Holy

"Ghost" (Acts, ii. 1-4), then at last their eyes were opened to the full mystery of their redemption, and they became as vividly conscious of the indwelling of God the Holy Ghost, as they had been for three years of the God who was made flesh and dwelt among them. From then onwards, as we see in the Acts and Epistles of the New Testament, they never ceased to bear witness to the gift of the Spirit and to His life-giving activity in the infant Church. It was the theme of St. Peter's first sermon (Acts, ii. 14-40). When he stepped out from the Upper Room and faced the multitude, the text he took was the prophecy of Joel: "And it shall come to pass, in the last days (saith the Lord), I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh."

Moreover, it changed their whole attitude to their mission. Hitherto, they had apparently regarded themselves as sent merely to tell men of what Christ had done. They realized now that their mission was infinitely more noble than any mere ministry of the word, that it was their privilege, as members of the living Christ, to act as channels of that divine life which the Father and Son would henceforth communicate to redeemed mankind through the Holy Ghost. "For our gospel," wrote St. Paul to the Thessalonians, "hath not been unto you in word only, but in power also and in the Holy Ghost, and in much fullness, as you know what manner of men we have been among you for your sakes. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in much tribulation, with joy of the Holy Ghost" (I Thess., i. 5-6).

Christianity Is God Living in Us

It follows, therefore, that if you are to be Christians in reality as well as in name, if you are to be adult, virile members of the Body of Christ worthy of your Confirmation, you must not only be permanently conscious of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, but must plan your lives accordingly. Read and meditate constantly on the eighth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and you will begin to understand, as you have never understood before, something at least of the full meaning of Christianity. Christianity is not a mere system, a mere code or form of human life, like Buddhism or Mohammedanism: it is a form of divine life, it is God living in us. Since Christ came on earth, we have been

given our choice between either of two lives—the one fleshly and the other spiritual, the one ending in eternal death and the other blossoming into eternal life. But it is not enough to choose the life of the Spirit: you must live the life of the Spirit. In Christ you live, move and have your being. The Spirit must not merely color every thought, word and deed of your daily round: it must be the motive and vital principle behind your every thought, word and deed. "For," as St. Paul says, "they that are according to the flesh, mind the things that are of the flesh; but they that are according to the Spirit, mind the things that are of the Spirit. For the wisdom of the flesh is death: but the wisdom of the Spirit is life and peace. Because the wisdom of the flesh is an enemy to God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither can it be. And they who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom., viii. 5-8).

Debtors to the Spirit

You made your choice in Baptism and renewed it in Confirmation, when you cut adrift from your dead past of sin. In the words of St. Paul, "you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. . . . And if Christ be in you, the body indeed is dead because of sin, but the Spirit liveth because of justification" (Rom., viii. 9-10). When you accepted the Sacrament of Confirmation, you not only did homage to the Holy Spirit as your liege lord, but you indebted yourself to His service by accepting His seven gifts for your equipment. You not only forswore your former allegiance to the flesh, but pledged yourself by a solemn military oath to fight it to the death. "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you shall die. But if by the Spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live" (Rom., viii. 12-13).

Indeed, loyal allegiance to the Holy Spirit in a lifelong warfare against the deeds of the flesh is the only key to eternal life. Your only title to inherit the kingdom of God is your sonship of God, and to be adopted into the divine family you must be made one with God's Son by the unitive bond of the Holy Spirit. "For whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For you have not received the spirit of bond-

age again in fear: but you have received the Spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: 'Abba, Father.' For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God; and if sons, heirs also, heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom., viii. 14-17).

God will not so confirm you in grace as to destroy your freedom, but He has confirmed you in fortitude to hold fast to grace, and as long as you do, you not merely have a title to eternal life, but you actually have that life; you have that for which you hope, and it needs only that the veils of the body be drawn aside for you to enjoy it to the full. "Likewise, the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity. For we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit asketh for us with unspeakable groanings" (Rom., viii. 26).

Rouse yourselves, therefore, to a fuller appreciation of this tremendous consequence of your Baptism and Confirmation, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within you. Some time ago, a Catholic in a French court of law preferred to swear upon his own body, because, as a "temple of the Holy Ghost," it was, he said, more sacred than any inanimate object. If his gesture was odd, his plea was not without justification. As long as you remain true to the pledges of your Confirmation, your bodies are shrines of the Holy Spirit, as sacred in the eyes of God as any man-made chapel. Treat them, therefore, with the reverence they deserve; hate and fear mortal sin as the one thing that can drive out their Divine Guest, and above all avoid like the pest those fleshly sins which so glaringly profane and defile their solemn consecration.

NOTES

THE SEVEN GIFTS OF THE HOLY GHOST

III

Third Sunday in Lent

The Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost

"You were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord. Walk, then, as children of the light; for the fruit of the light is in all goodness, and justice and truth" (Epistle, Eph., v. 8, 9).

SYNOPSIS:

- (1) *We are children of light, of grace. But grace does not oust nature. Hence the need of infused virtues and gifts. Confirmation matures and enriches these gifts. They are spiritual instincts. Their relation to the virtues, our spiritual faculties.*
- (2) *The first and greatest is Wisdom, a gift beyond man's reach, which only God can give. It corrects the bias of fallen nature and restores sense of values. Understanding enables us to penetrate to the inner truth, and comes only from experience of God. Counsel keeps conscience from the extremes of scrupulosity and laxity, and guides the prudent adviser. Fortitude helps us through our dark days (but of this more in a later instruction). Knowledge enables us to know created things in their relation to God, i.e., the whole truth, the purpose of life, evil, pain and failure. Piety or godliness develops single-minded devotion to God. It is the spirit of relationship, binding us to God and each other through Christ. Fear of the Lord, not servile but filial, is love's security and the crown of true wisdom.*
- (3) *How to use these gifts. Spiritual instincts, like natural, are atrophied by disuse. Can only move us if we are spiritually supple. Only mortification will break down our natural rigidity. Lent. We are pledged by Confirmation to take up cross daily.*

When, at our Baptism, we were made members of the Church of God, not only were we cleansed from the darkness of original sin, but we were also, in Our Lord's own words, "born again of water and the Holy Ghost." Originally children of the darkness, we were reborn as "children of the light." In addition to the natural life which we had received at our natural birth, we were now admitted by the Holy Ghost to a new

supernatural life, a mysterious sharing in God's own life, which, if we are faithful, will one day enable us to see and enjoy Him face to face in heaven.

But notice, this mysterious supernatural life, this indwelling of the Holy Spirit, of which we spoke last week, is an addition to, not a substitute for, our natural life. Grace does not oust nature: it leaves unimpaired the natural faculties of our body and soul, our memory, understanding and will, our senses and feelings, so that to all external appearances we are the same as before our rebirth. Now, our natural faculties, of themselves, can only function naturally: to act as outlets of the divine life within us or do anything supernatural, they must first be raised to the supernatural plane. In order, therefore, to supernaturalize our faculties, to make us able and even eager to act supernaturally, not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit, God, who does nothing by halves, infused into us at our rebirth the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, and the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. But even that was not enough; and so, to satisfy the demands of His divine generosity, He endowed us, in addition, with those seven precious gifts which we know as the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and the fear of the Lord.

The Meaning of the Gifts

These seven gifts are among the chief effects of Confirmation. It is true that they are already conferred, at least radically, in Baptism, because they are inseparable from the life of grace or indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which begins in Baptism. But, like the natural faculties and gifts of the new-born child, they remain latent rather than active, until the baptized child of God reaches spiritual maturity in Confirmation. Not till then are they bestowed in all their fullness, and not till then are they capable of exercising their full effect on our spiritual lives. If, therefore, we are to understand the true meaning of Confirmation as a permanent asset in life, we must first learn the meaning of these gifts and how to use them.

It is difficult to give a simple and yet accurate explanation of such

mysterious workings of God in the soul; but, perhaps, we can fairly define them by saying that they are *perfections of our spiritual nature, or, if you like, infused tendencies, which make us respond readily to the instinct of the Holy Spirit*. They are comparable to those infused virtues which, as we have already explained, elevate our natural faculties to supernatural activity, and yet, at the same time, they are clearly distinct from them. The infused virtues have each a special function: the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity) link our minds to God, the intellectual virtues (wisdom, knowledge and understanding) perfect our reason, and the moral virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance) perfect our appetites by bringing them under the control of reason. The function of the gifts, on the contrary, is general: their effect is to dispose *all* the powers of the soul to submit to the control of the Holy Spirit of God (St. Thomas, I-II, Q. lxviii, art. 8).

Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel

The first and greatest of the gifts is the spirit of *wisdom*. Whole books of the Old Testament are devoted to singing its praises. Born eternally of God, it presided over all His creation. "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways," it is made to say, "before He made anything from the beginning" (Prov., viii. 22). Moreover, it is a gift of God in a very special sense, in that it cannot be acquired by purely human effort. Many of the world's most learned men have been among its greatest fools, "because that, when they knew God, they have not glorified Him as God, or given thanks: but became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened. For professing themselves to be wise they became fools" (Rom., i. 21-22). Pundits like Bradlaugh, Ingersoll, and the philosophers of atheistic communism have even deluded themselves into denying God's existence, and the verdict of Holy Scripture was: "The fool said in his heart: there is no God" (Ps. lii. 1).

In cutting adrift from God, therefore, we necessarily throw ourselves into a sea of folly. "Where is wisdom to be found," asks Job, "and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof, neither is it found in the land of them that live in delights. The

depth saith: It is not in me: and the sea saith: It is not with me. The finest gold shall not purchase it, neither shall silver be weighed in exchange for it. . . . Whence then cometh wisdom? And where is the place of understanding? . . . God understandeth the way of it, and He knoweth the place thereof. . . . And He said to man: Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom: and to depart from evil is understanding" (xxviii. 12-28).

God has given us this wisdom in Confirmation, and if we continue always to hold Him in loving awe and reverence, He will enable it to produce its full fruits. It will restore that balance of our faculties, physical and spiritual, which was disturbed by the fall of our First Parents. The fall threw our nature out of joint; it strained our spiritual sinews, so that they no longer respond readily and easily to the bidding of the will. It made us spiritually myopic and distorted our vision, so that we see crookedly or not at all. The gift of wisdom corrects this unfortunate bias of our sinful nature. It gives us a sense of values, enabling us to see things in their true light and to estimate them at their true worth, so that we are no longer tempted to prefer our way to God's way, or our pleasure to His, to our eternal loss in both cases.

Wisdom is the mother of all the gifts, and *understanding* is her first-born child. By correcting our vision, it enables us to penetrate to the inner truth, to see things, not as they appear on the surface, but as they are in their innermost reality—in other words, to understand. Mere knowledge is not enough. A man may know the whole Catechism without understanding its deeper meaning. A theologian may study the Bible from cover to cover and read all the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and yet fail to see where it all leads; because, although he can acquire knowledge by his natural reason, only the Holy Spirit can give him spiritual understanding. That is why a poor peasant woman can and often does learn more from her Our Father and Hail Mary than the most learned thinker from all his library of books; because true understanding comes not from book knowledge *about* God, but from personal experience *of* God. The quickest way, therefore, to grow in understanding is to lead a full Christian life, to live as you pledged yourselves to live in Confirmation.

The first fruit of understanding is *counsel*. A man gifted with a sense of values and a clear insight into the mysteries of God is a man of sure judgment upon whose advice you can safely rely. Counsel may take either of two forms. There is that inner counsel given to a man by the voice of his conscience, and there is that outward advice which men give to one another. In both you need the gift of the Holy Ghost. It is the only thing that can guide your conscience safely between the two extremes of scrupulosity and laxity to which it is drawn. It teaches you, in case of serious doubt, to seek the advice of someone wiser or more experienced than yourself. At the same time, it teaches the adviser to be prudent, to make sure that he understands the case and the person, and, like a wise doctor, to seek principally to restore the person's own initiative and ability to judge for himself.

Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, Fear of the Lord

But for all our wisdom, understanding and counsel, there are times when God, to test our mettle, allows everything to become once again dark and confusing. Unable to see our way clearly, disappointed with the past and apprehensive of the future, we grow disheartened at the dead weight of the cross and are tempted to give up the struggle. It is then that the Holy Ghost comes to our aid with the invigorating gift of *fortitude*, so that, like Moses and the children of Israel after their perilous crossing of the Red Sea, we cry: "The Lord is my strength and my praise, and He is become salvation to me" (Exod., xv. 2). But fortitude is too characteristic of Confirmation to allow me to deal adequately with it in this brief review of the gifts; and so I leave it to a later instruction and pass on to the fourth gift, that of knowledge.

Knowledge here means knowledge of the things of God, the only knowledge that is always worth while. And notice again, it is a *gift* of God, a gift that He withdraws from those who are unfaithful to grace, but which, if we are faithful, will enable us to know created things not merely in themselves, as the learned do, but in their relation to God, as the Saints do. The astronomer in his observatory and the scientist in his laboratory may discover some of the material truths that lie open to the human eye, but only God can enable us to know the whole truth, to

see in every object, act and incident the fresh imprint of His creative finger. There are many things which are known to the confirmed Christian, which are hidden from the so-called intellectuals of this world. So we are told of Our Lord that "He rejoiced in the Holy Ghost and said: I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones" (Luke, x. 21).

The meaning of life, the problem of evil, the purpose of suffering and worldly failure, all of which are insoluble enigmas to the worldly wise, are crystal clear to those to whom the Holy Spirit has granted the gift of knowledge. The child knows that there is only one meaning to life: to know, love and serve God in this world, so as to be happy with Him for ever in the next. Evil is no problem to those who know that ours is a fallen nature and that we are free to be its masters or its slaves. Pain and failure may be hard to human nature, but they are no mystery to those who realize that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, that life was meant to be a time of trial, and that every cross bravely borne will have its eternal reward. Neither the mockery of the world nor the so-called findings of human science can shake their faith in the promises of Christ. They do not merely feel: they *know*. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My word shall not pass away" (Mark, xiii. 31).

The spirit of knowledge begets the spirit of piety; for piety or "godliness," as the Douai version translates it (Is., xi. 2), is nothing else than single-minded devotion to that supreme truth which is God. It is essentially the spirit of relationship. Faith and knowledge open our eyes to that mysterious bond which unites us to one another in Christ, and to God our Father through Christ. Piety strengthens that bond and makes it bear its full fruit of love and devotion to God, to Christ, to His Church, and to one another.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit begin with wisdom and end with the *fear of the Lord*; for the fear of the Lord is not only "the beginning of wisdom" and "the root of wisdom," but also "the fullness of wisdom" and "the crown of wisdom, filling up peace and the fruit of salvation" (Ecclus., i. 16, 25, 20, 22). It is not the servile fear of the bondman who has disobeyed his master, but the loving fear of the son who knows that it is

in his power to outrage the best of fathers. "For you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear: but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba, Father" (Rom., viii. 15). Far from impeding or diminishing our love of God, such fear can only serve to foster love. We fear Him because we love Him, because we cannot live without Him and yet have it in our power to lose Him. In Holy Scripture, the two go hand in hand. "They that fear the Lord," we read, "will seek after the things that are pleasing to Him: and they that love Him shall be pleased with His law" (Ecclus., ii. 19).

How to Make Them Effective

These then are the gifts which the Holy Ghost bestows upon you at your Confirmation. But do you make full use of them? It is a grave mistake to think that they work automatically. Holy Scripture refers to them as the "*spirit of wisdom*," "*the spirit of understanding*." They are not acquired habits: they are infused spiritual instincts which, like natural instincts, can easily become atrophied or dulled through disuse. Their purpose is to render us docile to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, and they cannot have their full effect except in those who, by constant crushing of the lower instincts of their fallen nature, have made themselves supernaturally supple and responsive to the instincts of the Holy Spirit. Let us be honest with ourselves. There is only one thing that will break down our natural rigidity, only one thing that will bend our stubborn nature and make it responsive to the Holy Spirit, and that is *mortification*. Now is the time to begin, now, during this time of Lent. But Lenten penances alone are not enough. Remember always that as "children of the light," as confirmed soldiers of Jesus Christ, you are pledged to take up your cross *daily* and follow Him.

NOTES

IV

REMEDIES FOR NEGLECT OF CONFIRMATION

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Remedies for the Modern Neglect of Confirmation

"Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise" (Epistle, Gal., iv. 28).

SYNOPSIS:

- (1) *We are heirs to the promises of Christ. One of them, Confirmation, a Sacrament of inestimable value, is commonly treated as a mere ceremonial incident.*
- (2) *In view of our readiness to forget our pledges, this neglect is not surprising. Nor is it new. Trent had to stress the urgent need of making Confirmation a living reality. An even greater need to-day. Then it was the unity of the Church that was threatened. To-day, religion itself is in jeopardy. We are at war with the godless. Why then this neglect of the soldier's Sacrament?*
- (3) *Is it made sufficiently impressive? It was intimate and impressive enough in the early Church, when numbers were fewer. But to-day, with our inevitable mass Confirmations, its individual import tends to be crowded out. How obtain individual realization? Not by postponing to a maturer age. The Church forbids this. The child needs strengthening at the outset of its moral life. No, the remedy lies in keeping the significance of Confirmation permanently before the eyes of all, old and young.*
- (4) *How? (a) Solid preparation. Cooperation of parents indispensable. (b) Making the day a great occasion, like First Communion. (c) Individual and corporate renewal of Confirmation pledges, every time the Sacrament is renewed in the parish. Anniversaries.*

Abraham had two sons. The first, Ismael, he begot by a natural union with his bondwoman Agar. The second, Isaac, was miraculously born to him in answer to prayer and in fulfillment of a divine promise, when both he and his wife, Sarah, were already far advanced in years. These two sons, as St. Paul says, typify the two Testaments, the Old and the New, the children of Israel who were born in bondage, and the children of God who are "born again of water and the Holy Ghost." As Ismael,

child of the flesh, was cast out, so were the Jews who resisted the Spirit deprived of their inheritance. As Isaac, who was miraculously born by the power of the Holy Ghost, became the child of promise, so we who are born to God in Christ by the indwelling of His Spirit, have inherited the promises of Christ.

Trent Warned against Neglect of Confirmation

Now, one of these promises was the Sacrament of Confirmation, in which we receive the Holy Ghost, together with all His gifts, in order to make us adult and mature children of God and faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ. In previous instructions, I have tried to show you how insistently Our Lord stressed the importance of this infusion of the Holy Spirit. We have studied the meaning of His seven gifts and seen how, if we tame the stubborn flesh by mortification, they will make us responsive, as by instinct, to His holy inspirations. We have learned to appreciate that Confirmation is as necessary to the life of the soul as growth and maturity are to the full life of the body, and that it carries with it the same adult powers and the same adult responsibilities. And yet the fact remains that the majority of us treat Confirmation as an act, a ceremonial incident, solemn enough at the time perhaps, but with little or no subsequent effect on our lives. We have a faint recollection of choosing a name, of kneeling before the bishop and being patted on the cheek, but otherwise the whole ceremony, along with its significance and its consequences, has been relegated to the limbo of forgotten memories.

Our forgetfulness is not altogether surprising. Confirmation, as far as we are actively concerned, is primarily the occasion of making a solemn promise, of pledging ourselves to a way of life that is anything but congenial to human nature; and, as we know from the record of pledges given at retreats, missions and admittance to confraternities, we have a convenient but regrettable habit of speedily forgetting such occasions. If, therefore, the importance of Confirmation tends to be disregarded to-day, the same thing, as you might guess, has happened before. For example, the Catechism of the Council of Trent, issued in the sixteenth century, begins its Chapter on Confirmation with these

words: "If there was ever need for pastors to be diligent in explaining the Sacrament of Confirmation, it is certainly necessary to-day to throw as much light on it as possible, since there are many in the holy Church of God who neglect this Sacrament altogether, and very few who seek to derive from it the fruit of divine grace which they ought. On Whit-sunday, therefore, the principal day for confirming, and also on such other days as pastors shall find convenient, the faithful must be taught about the nature, power and dignity of this Sacrament, and made to understand that, far from neglecting it, they should receive it piously and religiously, lest, through their own fault and to their extreme detriment, this divine benefit should seem to have been conferred upon them in vain" (*Cat. Rom.*, II, iii, 1).

Trent's Warning Is Especially Applicable To-Day

This warning, issued at a time when Christendom was being disrupted by Protestantism, when the seamless robe of Christ was being rent and diced for by tyrannous kings and governments, is equally necessary in these days of religious indifference and open apostasy. Then it was the unity of the Church that was threatened. To-day it is the very existence of religion that is being attacked. The Lutherans, Calvinists and Anglicans of the sixteenth century defended their tragic rebellion as a duty to God, and punished atheists almost as violently as they persecuted Catholics. But the battle-front has changed, and to-day in godless Russia, in bandit Mexico, in church-burning Spain and in ruthless Germany, it is the very worship of God that is in jeopardy. If, therefore, the evils of the Reformation awakened the Church to the urgent need of strengthening its defenses and restoring Confirmation, the Sacrament of strength, to its primitive importance in Christian life, the evils of modern public and private life make that need a thousand times more urgent to-day. The first sermon of the confirmed St. Peter converted 3000 souls to Christ. In Hallein, a small town near Salzburg, according to a newspaper report, 300 people apostatized recently *en masse*, after an harangue by Reich-Commissioner Bürckel. The battle has begun. We are not merely preparing for war: we are *at war*.

Why then do we neglect the soldier's Sacrament of Confirmation?

It is bad enough that we should make so little use of the Sacraments in general, when, as we know, they are our first line of defense. But, surely, to neglect Confirmation is sheer madness: it is to throw away our arms, to spike our guns, to abandon our ammunition, and stand open and defenseless before an enemy who, whatever his faults, knows the art of warfare and makes full use of every weapon in his armoury. Why do we do it?

Confirmation Less Intimate and Individual Than of Old

One reason suggested is that we do not surround Confirmation with sufficient solemnity. Perhaps this is true. In the early Church, when men were vividly conscious of the mission of the Holy Ghost, the enlistment of new soldiers of Christ was apparently a much more impressive occasion. Normally it followed immediately after the ceremony of Baptism. While the Baptism was still in progress, the bishop proceeded to a special chapel, known as the *consignatorium*, where, in other words, the *sign* or seal was to be set on the ceremony of initiation. On leaving the baptistery, the newly-baptized Christian was anointed with chrism by a priest. Assisted by his godparents, he then resumed his outer garments, or put on new white garments, and entered the *consignatorium*. There, the bishop solemnly imposed hands upon him, calling down upon him the fullness of the Holy Ghost. Then, taking the holy chrism, he signed him on the forehead with "the mark of charity," or sign of the cross, and finally embraced him, saying: "The Lord be with thee." To which the candidate replied: "And with thy spirit."

To-day largely owing to circumstances beyond our control (notably, for example, the great increase in the number of the faithful), Confirmation is a much less intimate and impressive ceremony. Most bishops can only do the round of their dioceses once in every five years. The result is that candidates are crowded into church by the hundred, and long queues are steadily disposed of at a speed which, however regrettable, can scarcely be avoided in the circumstances. But if mass Confirmations are inevitable, that is no reason for treating a Sacrament of lifelong significance as a mere ceremonial incident, neither more nor less important than the bishop's five-yearly visit. The press, in recent years,

has reported more than one instance of a wedding *en masse*. To its political promoters, such an event was probably only another piece of ceremonial propaganda; but we can be quite sure that, to every couple concerned, it was an occasion as individual and significant as if marriage had been instituted for them alone. It should not be impossible to make our mass Confirmations equally significant to the individual. All that is necessary is that every individual should be made to feel that Confirmation, like marriage, is an irrevocable step, with a lifelong, indeed, an eternal effect.

Not Postponement but Constant Emphasis Is the Remedy

It may be suggested that the remedy lies in later Confirmation, that the child-mind is too irresponsible to grasp the gravity of the occasion, and that the Sacrament should, therefore, be postponed to a maturer age. But even in the early Church Confirmation was only delayed when Baptism was delayed, and the Church of to-day stands definitely against postponement. Spiritual maturity is reached many years in advance of physical maturity. The child becomes subject to temptation and in danger of sin as soon as he reaches the use of reason. From then onwards he is captain of his soul and master of his destiny, and, therefore, it is then that he most needs strengthening. Prevention is better than cure. It is a fatal policy to wait until the enemy has already made inroads before erecting the necessary defenses. The remedy for indifference to Confirmation, therefore, does not lie in its postponement: that would be grasping at the shadow and missing the substance. No, the remedy lies in keeping Confirmation, its meaning, its effects and its consequent responsibilities constantly before the eyes of every Christian, young and old.

Thorough Preparation

How are we to do this? Well, there are many ways of impressing the solemnity and importance of Confirmation on the mind and memory of the recipient, some direct and some indirect. One thing, however, is absolutely indispensable, and that is solid preparation. That, you may say, is surely the job of the priest and the teacher. Substantially it is.

But remember, the priest and the teacher have access to the child's mind for a part only of the time of preparation, and not always the most direct access. A large part of the time is spent in the home, and it is the home influence that counts for most, because it is the parents who have the most direct access to the child's impressionable mind and heart.

Thorough preparation, therefore, requires that you parents should coöperate with the priest and the teacher in instilling into your child's receptive mind a great reverence for the Sacrament he is about to receive, and a vivid realization of all that it involves. He must be taught in simple language about the Holy Spirit who dwells in him as in a shrine, about the coming consecration of that shrine, and about its adornment with the seven precious gifts. Above all, he must be made to look forward to the day of his Confirmation as one of the great days of his life. He must be made to see in it the day of his enlistment as a full-fledged soldier of Jesus Christ, the day on which he ceases to be a spiritual child and becomes a grown-up Christian like yourselves. It should not be difficult to drive these simple ideas well and truly home. Every child loves to play at soldiers, just as he loves to play at being grown-up. It is for you to introduce a note of reality into his play, to give him a sense of achievement, by changing him from a make-believe soldier with an imaginary foe into a crusader with a real foe. "Heart speaketh to heart." If you yourselves are animated by the spirit of the crusader, if you are convinced to the very depth of your being of the truth of your teaching and its vital importance to the eternal welfare of your child, you will find that he is not slow to respond.

Making the Reception of Confirmation a Great Occasion

Then again, you can help considerably by surrounding the day, when it comes, with an air of festive solemnity. You rightly make a great occasion of your child's First Communion: it is a great day, and it deserves to be fittingly celebrated. And yet, from the practical, human point of view, it can hardly be said to need stressing to anything like the same extent as Confirmation. Holy Communion can be repeated again and again in a manner that should prevent the child from ever forgetting its importance; whereas Confirmation can only be received once, and

unless it is made a great occasion, to be constantly recalled in after life, it is as likely as not to become a dead letter. You never fail to celebrate a coming-of-age, or an ordination to the priesthood: well, your child's Confirmation is his spiritual coming-of-age, his ordination to the universal priesthood of Christ. Make sure that it lives in his memory.

But it is not enough to make Confirmation a happy memory. If it is to play its proper part in your lives, it must be to all of you an ever-present reality. And therefore, just as a priest keeps every anniversary of his promotion to the rank of officer in the army of Christ not merely as a day of rejoicing, but also as a day of reckoning, so should every anniversary of your enlistment remind you of the debt you owe to your great Leader, and of how indifferently you have hitherto paid it. So too, every time the bishop comes to this parish to confirm, it should be an occasion of great *personal* significance, not merely to the candidates, but to every one of you. You are old soldiers witnessing the swearing-in of new recruits, new comrades. Their enlistment should remind you of your enlistment, their dedication of your dedication. The whole parish, individually and as a body, should make use of the opportunity to recall the gift of the Holy Ghost, to regret past infidelities, and to renew with even greater ardor the pledges, once solemnly given, of lifelong, faithful and militant service in the cause of Christ.

The priest has a uniform to remind him of his eternal dedication to the service of God. You have no reminder other than the voice of conscience, no uniform other than the mantle, plain for all to see, of faithful Catholic action. That is why you must use every opportunity to recall your dedication to mind. When you reach the stage that you can no more forget your Confirmation than a priest can forget his Ordination, then and then only will this great Sacrament be to you what Christ Our Lord meant it to be.

NOTES

v

SOLDIERS OF CHRIST

Passion Sunday Soldiers of Christ

"They took up stones, therefore, to cast at Him" (Gospel, John, viii. 59).

SYNOPSIS: (1) *Passiontide commemorates Christ's victorious assault on the citadel of evil. Yet the struggle goes on. The moral of to-day's Gospel is the eternal antipathy of good and evil.*

(2) *Man's life is a warfare, a fight to the death. No escape, because chief enemy is own self. The flesh lusteth against the spirit. No non-combatants: a man is with Christ or against Him. No man can serve two masters.*

(3) *You renounced Satan and chose Christ in Baptism, becoming a child of God. In Confirmation, you grew to spiritual manhood and became a soldier of Christ. It gave you a "character," a badge of your enlistment. It clothed you in grace, as in a uniform, trained you to fight and equipped you. It gave you the virtue and gift of fortitude, i.e., the power and instinct of courage, so necessary in this the sternest of all battles. It gave you fear of the Lord as your safeguard.*

(4) *Your enemies are the devil, the world and the flesh. You must fight them in soldierly fashion, according to plan, conquering the devil by open conflict, the world by detachment, the flesh by mortification.*

(5) *You are at war, and must fight as an army. To achieve the ideal of a nation in arms, we must resort, like the dictators, to mass propaganda. You must share. Confirmation makes you not only soldiers, but shock troops, recruiting sergeants.*

To-day, we begin Passiontide, that tragic and yet glorious fortnight in which our God-made-man gave the lie to the world and its vain judgments by snatching victory from defeat and eternal life from the very jaws of death. We commemorate Our Lord's sufferings: but we also commemorate the culmination of that lifelong struggle which Our Lord waged against the forces of evil. We see the Passion as His final assault on the citadel of Satan, in which He gave His life as the price of victory,

and died that we might live. But if Christ's victory was complete, in that it broke the age-long domination of Satan, and made the final issue sure for all who follow in the footsteps of the Victor, it would be a tragic mistake to regard it as the end of the struggle. The moral of the story told in to-day's Gospel is precisely that there is an eternal antipathy between good and evil, between God and Satan, between the Father of truth and the father of lies. "If I say the truth to you," Our Lord asked His enemies, "why do you not believe Me? He that is of God, heareth the words of God. Therefore (that is why) you hear them not, because you are not of God." For three years He had sought to convince them of the truth, and, as we have just seen, their only answer was to take up stones to cast at Him.

Life Is a Fight to the Death with No Neutrals

"The life of man upon earth," said holy Job, "is a warfare" (vii. 1). It is a fight that knows neither truce nor armistice, a fight in which death means victory for those who die fighting for the Lord of life, but a fight to the death in any case. Christ Our Lord has ousted the powers of darkness from that stronghold which they seized at the fall of Adam; but if they no longer block the road that leads to His kingdom, they still beset it with their snares and ambushes, and they will go on doing so, every day and every hour, until He routs them eternally at His final coming.

Moreover, there is no escaping the fight. The powers of evil are too close, too intimate, to be easily avoided. You cannot outflank an enemy when he rides with you. You cannot lightly shake him off, when he surrounds you and clings to you like a garment; and the enemy of our soul is nearer to us, closer to us, than any garment. It is ourselves: we are our own greatest enemies. There is in each of us, as St. Paul says, not one but two men: "the old man, who is corrupted according to the desire of error," and "the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth" (Eph., iv. 22-24; cfr. Rom., vi. 6; Col., iii. 9). The "old man" in you is your fallen nature, that fleshly other self of which you can never quite rid yourself, that "body of sin" which you know to be a slave of the devil, the world, and its own triple concu-

piscence—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The "new man" in you is that new, spiritual being which was born in you at your Baptism by water and the Holy Ghost, and grew to maturity in you when you received the fullness of the Holy Ghost in Confirmation. Between these two there can be nothing but ceaseless struggle: "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, for these are contrary one to another" (Gal., v. 17).

So too, in this warfare, there can be no non-combatants. "He that is not with Me, is against Me," said Our Lord, "and he that gathereth not with Me, scattereth" (Matt., xii. 30). You either fight the flesh together with its allies, the devil and the world, or you become its slave. There is no half way. "No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will sustain the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt., vi. 24). Everyone must take his choice—God or the devil, love or hate: there is no neutrality.

You Have Chosen to Fight for Christ

You have made your choice: you made it in Baptism. The question was put to you: "Do you renounce Satan?" And you answered through your godparents: "I do renounce him." "And all his works?" "I do renounce them." "And all his pomps?" "I do renounce them." You were then cleansed from sin and made a child of God, spiritually alive with the Holy Spirit of God. For some years this new spiritual life lay dormant in you, alive and yet passive rather than active, until the day when with the dawn of reason you became aware of your divine birth and dignity, and conscious of your great responsibilities. Then it was that, to match the bodily and mental change in you by a similar spiritual change, you received a new Sacrament. You were confirmed in the Holy Ghost, brought to spiritual maturity, and turned from a passive into an active member of the Body of Christ. You became not only a child of God, but also a soldier of Christ. You had already forsworn your allegiance to Satan in Baptism. Now, in Confirmation, you went a step further. You took the military oath to Christ as your sole Commander, you enlisted in His army, you took His uniform and equipment,

and stood before the world with His badge stamped indelibly on your brow.

Confirmation Enlists and Equips You

That is the meaning of the character or mark which Confirmation, like Baptism and Holy Orders, leaves on the soul of the recipient. St. Augustine compares it to the *nota* or stamp which marked the Roman legionary and made it impossible for him ever to abandon his post without revealing himself to all as a deserter and traitor to his oath. Like the stamp on a coin, it bears testimony to your worth in the eyes of the God to whom you belong, consecrates you to His service, and can never be defaced without insult and treason to His Majesty.

You are, therefore, soldiers of Christ irrevocably and to the hour of your death. But Confirmation not only enlists you in God's army: it also equips you and arms you for the fray. By endowing you with a special increase of the habit of sanctifying grace, it clothes you in God's uniform, and by an abundant infusion of actual graces it enables you to live in a manner worthy of Him whose livery you bear. It develops all the powers of your soul and trains them for their special work. It enriches you with all the gifts of the Holy Ghost, especially the soldier's gifts of fortitude and fear of the Lord. In the words of St. Paul, you are "strengthened in the Lord, and in the might of His power" (Eph., vi. 10).

Fortitude, the chief weapon with which Confirmation equips you, means, above all, courage to confess your faith and fight valiantly against the enemies of your soul. Considered as a virtue, it is a divinely infused power that enables you to stand steadfast and true to your faith and its obligations, whatever the strength of the opposition. Considered as a gift of the Holy Ghost, it is that divine impulse, that generous instinct, that noble aspiration, which turns mere steadfastness into downright heroism and makes you not only ready but eager to fight for Christ.

Baptism and Confirmation have endowed you with both the virtue and the gift of fortitude, both the power and the instinct to be brave. And for a very good reason. It is not always easy to be true to your faith. You may not be subject to bloody persecution; although, if we are to judge by the happenings in Russia, Mexico, Spain and Ger-

many, even that may come. But whether it comes or not, your faith will seldom be anything but a hindrance to you in everyday life. Nor is it easy to live up to the high standards of your calling. There are many things which others presume to do, which you may not do; there is many a way out of a difficulty, whether in business or in family life, which others do not scruple to take, but which you know to be mortal sin. It is not easy to be a Catholic, a soldier of Christ, everywhere and all the time. Indeed, it would be impossible, were it not for this power and instinct of fortitude with which we are divinely endowed. But remember, they do not work automatically. A power can be atrophied by disuse, and an instinct stunted by neglect. They are spiritual weapons, and if they are to operate at all, they must be given constant exercise; that is to say, you must die to the flesh and begin to live entirely according to the spirit.

To complete your equipment, you have received also the gift of the fear of the Lord, which enables you to serve your great Commander with loving awe, and to dread nothing so much as to incur His displeasure by cowardice or desertion. There is room in the world to-day for more of the old-fashioned fear of the Lord, for more God-fearing men and women. God is love, yes, but at the same time He is the all-holy, the almighty, and the all-just; and the infinite chasm between us and Him should alone suffice to inspire an unceasing awe. It is your safeguard, for, as Holy Scripture says, "the fear of the Lord driveth out sin" (Ecclus., i. 27).

Your Enemies and How to Fight Them

Such then is your equipment. What of your enemies? They are, as you know, three: the devil, the world, and the flesh. They are enemies in the strict sense of the word. Christ, your King, has declared eternal war against them, and you, as soldiers of Christ, are pledged by your Confirmation to fight them and, what is more, to fight them in soldierly fashion. It is not enough for you to avoid them, or to oppose them haphazardly: you are under oath to pursue and attack them in a planned campaign.

The *devil*, as the incarnation of evil, must be fought and conquered

in open conflict, without truce, evasion, or compromise. Christianity allows of only one hate, one undying enmity; but it makes that an obligation. Just as you are bound to love all God's children, so you are bound to hate the devil and the damned, and to loathe, detest, fight, and crush all that they stand for. The *world*, too, must be fought, but mainly by evasion, by detachment. You are in the world but not of it. You must, therefore, reject its standards of what is worthwhile in life, you must despise and ignore its misleading judgments, and by constant pursuit of the spirit of true wisdom you must rise superior to its poisonous and all-pervading atmosphere. The *flesh*, as your most insidious enemy, you must crush by constant mortification. Mortification means killing, putting to death. It is not easy, nothing like so easy as fighting the devil and the world, because it means killing your other self, going against the grain, dying in order that you may live. But if nothing is harder, nothing is more essential to the soldier of Christ. The "new man" cannot come fully to life until the "old man" is dead. You cannot be free to fight for Christ, until you have killed, amputated, and shaken off this dead weight of putrefaction, this "body of sin" that is always bearing you down.

A Nation in Arms

But wars are not won by individual effort alone. It is true that you cannot fight effectively until you have conquered yourself, but it is equally true that the forces of evil will not be checked until all soldiers of Christ are roused to a sense of their common danger and take the field together. We are one body in Christ, and we must fight His battles as one body. The idea of a Christendom in arms against evil is no chimera: it is the goal at which we must aim. If it has been possible in totalitarian states to militarize the whole population from six to sixty, to equip mere children with toy guns and make them realize the integral part they play in the defense of the nation, it ought to be equally possible for us to fire our youth from their earliest years with the crusading spirit of the Church Militant, to make them vividly conscious of that badge of Christ the King which they bear on their brows, and to train them in the use of the armor of the Holy Spirit which they receive in Confirmation.

To realize his ideal of a nation in arms, the totalitarian leader has first by intensive propaganda to convince his people of the magnitude of the issues at stake and of the need for the active coöperation of every man, woman and child. The Church Militant has no need to exaggerate the importance of the issues at stake in her fight for Christ: they are great beyond all possibility of exaggeration. She has no need of *lying* propaganda to state her case: it is God's own truth that Christian life is a warfare and every Christian, young and old, a soldier. But she *has* need of propaganda, every bit as insistent as that of the dictators, propaganda from every pulpit and platform, in the church, in the street, in the school and in the home, if she is to rouse those multitudes of Christians who have forgotten their Confirmation to a sense of their duty as soldiers of Christ. That is your work, as the shock-troops of God's army. It is not enough that you are ready to do your bit, when the fight happens to come your way. If you are alive to your oneness in Christ, you will be on fire with eagerness to rouse every other member of that one body to the same heroic resolve. Confirmation not only made you soldiers, it also made you recruiting sergeants, pledged not only to fight in, but to swell the army of Christ.

"Put you on (therefore) the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in high places. Therefore, take unto you the armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about you with truth, and having on the breastplate of justice, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one" (Eph., vi. 11-16).

VI

THE LAY APOSTOLATE

Palm Sunday The Lay Apostolate

"Say ye, that the Lord hath need of them" (Gospel, Matt., xxi. 3).

SYNOPSIS:

- (1) *It is an error to think of the Church as two distinct bodies, clergy and laity. It is a single living organism, many members forming one body in Christ. All share to some degree in the priesthood of Christ. A twofold priesthood: the official priesthood conferred by Holy Orders, and the common priesthood, of which Confirmation can be called the Sacrament.*
- (2) *The basis of Catholic Action. All share in the apostolic hierarchy. Catholic Action is the action of the Body of Christ, i.e., Christ living and acting to the full in every one of His members, priest and layman.*
- (3) *Tremendous field to-day for lay activity, the lay apostolate. The world no longer accepts the authority of the Church or her official ministers. Only you can break through the barrier of indifference. It is not a counsel: it is your duty. You are fishers of men.*
- (4) *You must evangelize: (a) by word, exercising the gifts of wisdom, counsel, etc.; (b) by deed, doing all you can to permeate public life with Catholic principles. Not all can campaign in public, but all can and must preach by good example.*
- (5) *Not easy. Requires unworldliness, mortification, constant attention to the voice of the Holy Spirit, subordination of worldly success to Christian principles and action. But it was for this you were confirmed. You can do all things in Him who strengtheneth you.*
Conclusion.

There is a general tendency to-day to regard the Church of Christ as composed of two radically distinct bodies, the clergy and the laity. According to this misconception, the clergy alone are the active element, responsible to Christ not only for the government and administration of the Church, but for all active steps towards its spread and development. The laity, on the other hand, are relegated to the status of a purely passive element, whose only function is to be molded as the potter

molds the clay, and to provide, when required, the material resources necessary for the Church's external activities. It is true that this doctrine has no official support or approval, and can only be said to be widespread in so far as it represents a common attitude of mind. But the fact remains that it is as pernicious in practice as it is wrong in theory, and until it is eradicated, there can be no full Christian life.

Confirmation the Layman's Ordination

The truth is that the Church is one single living organism, consisting, like the human body, of many members; and though these members differ in dignity and in function, nevertheless, they are intimately linked and coördinated by a common vital principle and a common action. "For as the body is one," says St. Paul, "and hath many members, and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body, so also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or gentiles, whether bond or free: and in one Spirit we have all been made to drink" (I Cor., xii. 12-13). It follows, therefore, that since Christ is "a priest for ever," we who are one in Christ, we who are the Mystical Christ, share all alike in His eternal priesthood. "You are a chosen generation," said St. Peter to his disciples, "a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people" (I Pet., ii. 9); and so he exhorted them to be "as living stones built up, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (*ibid.*, 5).

We can distinguish, therefore, in the Church a twofold priesthood. There is an official, ordained priesthood which belongs only to those who have received the full Sacrament of Holy Orders, and which enables them, and them alone, to renew on our altars the unique sacrifice of the New Testament. But, at the same time, there is an unofficial or common priesthood, shared by all who are made one in Christ, our great High-Priest, by Baptism, and who are consecrated by the fullness of His Spirit in Confirmation. That is why Confirmation is so much in need of emphasis to-day. It is, as it were, the layman's ordination. In Confirmation, as in Holy Orders, there is a laying-on of hands, there is an infusion of the Holy Ghost, there is an anointing with chrism, and

there is the conferring of a special character. Do not misunderstand me. Confirmation is not a lesser form of Holy Orders: it does not make you sacrificing priests in the unique Christian sense of the word. But, by completing the work of Baptism, it consecrates you in a very special way, and enables you, in St. Peter's words, "to offer up *spiritual* sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

The Basis of Catholic Action

It is this principle which is at once the basis and the explanation of the doctrine of Catholic Action, that movement in which the present Holy Father sees the only hope of salvation for the modern world. "Catholic Action," says Cardinal Pizzardo, "is the participation of the laity in the hierarchical apostolate of the Church." "You are," in the Pope's own words, "sharers in the apostolic hierarchy." The Catholic Church is not a man-made organization, like a trade union, gathering men under its banner to work together for a common end. It is not an organization at all: it is, as we have already pointed out, a living *organism*, the Mystical Body of Christ, with a living Head and living members, vivified by the same one Spirit as its living soul; and its action is, or should be, the action of Christ the Head in us, the members. Catholic Action, therefore, is not a mere coördination of Catholic societies or Catholic activities. It is the fullness of Christian life, Catholic Christianity lived actively, positively, and all the time by every Catholic Christian, guided, inspired, and vitalized by that divinely active Spirit of whose fullness we have all received in the Sacrament of Confirmation. In calling us to Catholic Action, the Pope is simply bidding us to be true to our Confirmation, to bear witness in our daily lives to the one Spirit that is in us all, priest and layman alike, to be active members of "Jesus Christ, yesterday, and to-day, and the same forever" (Heb., xiii. 8).

A Great Field To-Day for the Lay Apostle

The Holy Father's appeal has a special urgency to-day, when there is such a tremendous field for Catholic lay activity. Time was when the Church's sway throughout Christendom was unquestioned, and her ordained ministers were able to press the application of Christian princi-

ples in every sphere of life. Men might be unchristian in practice, but they could not plead ignorance of the truth. The Church was there, in the legislature, the law courts and the trade guilds, ready and able to urge the true Christian solution of every problem that might arise, and no one thought of disputing her divine authority.

But to-day all that has changed. The world speaks no longer of "the Church," but of "the churches," and amid the babel of conflicting voices begs leave to solve its own problems in its own particular way. Men still read with passing curiosity such pronouncements of the Pope or the bishops as may chance to have news value, but that is about the limit of their practical interest and attention. For all practical purposes, the ordained ministers of the one true Church, to which all men are called to belong, are as completely excluded from political, civic, and industrial life as if they were the representatives of a foreign government. A barrier has been raised to authoritative, official Christianity, which only you, its lay apostles, can hope to pierce.

And please do not think that this work of penetration is a mere counsel, urged upon you for the sake of expedience, or that you are being asked to do someone else's job. It is your job, your duty. You have been enlisted by Confirmation as the shock-troops of Christ, not merely to stand on defense, to hold your own, but to carry His standard into the enemy's stronghold. You were not anointed as disciples, but as apostles, and it is your mission to preach your faith, to bear witness to it, to "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt., v. 16). Listen to the words of the heroic Cardinal Faulhaber, champion of the persecuted Church in Germany: "Through Baptism we become children of God, through Confirmation we become apostles of Christ; through Baptism we become stones in the City of God, through Confirmation we receive the summons to be workers and builders in that City. It is not enough for us to be fishes in the net of the Apostle, we must be fishers and apostles ourselves."¹

¹ Quoted by Laros, "Confirmation in the Modern World" (Sheed and Ward), p. 77. An invaluable accompaniment for preachers of this series of instructions.

Permeating Public Life with Christian Principles

But how are you to exercise your God-given ministry, your apostolate? By word and by deed. In Confirmation you received the gifts of wisdom, understanding and counsel, and God demands that you should put them to good account. They may show little sign of their presence in you: that is because they are instincts and can be dulled by disuse. But if you will only strive courageously to crush the fleshly man in you and to live according to the Spirit, they will gradually revive and begin to inspire your every action. You may not have occasion to mount a platform in defense of your faith, but your eyes will be opened so fully to its riches, its deeper meaning, and its tremendous importance in the scale of things, that your ordinary conversations and casual remarks will reflect your conviction and begin, little by little, to bear the fruit of conviction in others.

Many of you, far more of you than at present realize it, can carry your apostolate into active civic life. There is no need for a Catholic political party. Still less is there need for Catholics to play the political game in its less reputable forms; for the end never justifies the means. But there is need for Catholics to interest themselves actively in political and civic government, using every honest means at their disposal to ensure the adoption and application of Christian principles, the Christian solution of disputes, and the permeation of public life by the Christian spirit. Every confirmed Catholic has civic duties to perform in public life, and it is wrong to think that you can escape them, or live in indifference to the common weal, without serious fault. Christianity was never meant to be merely a private antidote to the ills of worldliness, merely a better side to private life. It was meant to be interwoven into the whole fabric of life, public and private, to be in fact the life lived by every individual, corporation, and community.

That is your work, a work that only you can do: to go out into the world and show forth Christ in every word you speak and in every act you perform. It is a work, moreover, from which no one can validly excuse himself on the ground of lack of ability or lack of opportunity. You may not be able to write or speak in public profession of your faith.

You may not be able to lead your fellowmen or exert a Christian influence in the more public walks of life. But there is not one of you that cannot preach by his good example and exert an influence for good by the eloquence of his acts.

A Difficult Task but Well within Your Power

I do not want to pretend that it is an easy task. There is none so difficult. To do it, you must first rid yourselves of your worldliness, and begin to see things, not as men see them, but as God sees them. You must crush the flesh with all its inordinate cravings, and respond only to the instincts of your higher nature. In every problem of life you must ask yourselves, not what it suits your convenience to do, but what Christ would have you do, Christ whose soldier you are and of whose Body you are a living member. You must be guided, not by the voice of self-interest or the advice of the worldly wise, but by the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, of whom you are the living temple. The world will applaud and reward you, if you achieve success in your business, profession or trade, and will care little how you achieve it as long as you do not fall foul of "the law." But no amount of worldly success will win you God's praises and rewards. To be His soldier, His apostle, as you are pledged to be, you must be a Christian first, foremost, and all the time, in every business deal, in every professional contact, in every industrial relationship, in every department of your public and private life.

Do not be disheartened by the magnitude of the task. You are not called to fight a lone battle, unarmed and defenseless, against a mightier foe. Indeed, if you will only stop to count your forces, you will find that the advantages are all on your side. You are sons of God and heirs to His Kingdom. Fighting with you are millions of other confirmed soldiers of Christ, and around you are all the hosts of heaven, all the mighty community of the Saints. You have at your disposal that divine and inexhaustible strength, as yet almost untapped, with which you were endowed at your Confirmation, the strength of God the Holy Ghost dwelling in you. You are equipped both for corporate action and for personal initiative: for corporate action by that sense of unity in one

Spirit with which Confirmation inspires you; and for personal initiative by that spiritual maturity to which, in receiving this Sacrament, you have attained. There is no enemy, no obstacle, no fiery trial or bitter struggle that you need fear; for blazoned on your banner is the triumphant battle-cry of St. Paul: "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me" (Phil., iv. 13).

Be true, therefore, to your high calling and to the great trust that God has reposed in you. During these last few weeks I have tried to bring home to you the tremendous significance and importance of Confirmation, especially in this pagan modern world of ours. I have explained to you its riches and insisted on the solemn and irrevocable obligations which its reception involves. One day you will have to render an account of your stewardship and answer for the fulfillment of the pledges you have undertaken. Prepare now against that day by meditating seriously on what this Sacrament has hitherto meant to you; and what it must, in the future, mean to you. Instill into the minds of those whom God has entrusted to your care a sense of its deep and lifelong importance. Make them realize what it is and what it involves to be enlisted as soldiers of Christ; and every time the Sacrament is renewed in your parish church, seize the opportunity to renew your own allegiance to Christ and the pledge you gave Him of active, militant, and lifelong devotion to His cause. God calls you. God wants you. The words He spoke to His Apostles on the first Palm Sunday, are reechoed by His Vicar to-day: "Say ye, that the Lord hath need of them."

NOTES